

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TAGS: PINS PINT IN

SUBJECT: BIHAR SITUATION

REFS: A. NEW DELHI 3764. B. NEW DELHI 4043

BEGIN SUMMARY. POLITICAL DISCORD IN BIHAR CONTINUES TO MOUNT. THE EMERGENCE OF GANDHIAN SOCIAL WORKER JAYA PRAKASH NARAYAN AS THE LEADER OF DISGRUNTLED FORCES SEEKING TO RESTORE A MORAL ELEMENT TO INDIAN POLITICS, HAS INTENSIFIED PRESSURE ON THE BIHAR GOVERNMENT AND THE PRIME MINISTER PERSONALLY. THE BIHAR LEGISLATURE HAS BEEN ABRUPTLY ADJOURNED AND OPPOSITION STAGE LEGISLATORS, FOLLOWED BY ALL CONGRESS-R MINISTERS, ARE MOVING TOWARDS RESIGNATION FROM ASSEMBLY AND STATE MINISTRY RESPECTIVELY. WHETHER A RUMORED BIHAR CABINET RESHUFFLE WILL BUY TIME AND PLACATE NARAYAN, DISGRUNTLED CONGRESS-R DISSIDENTS, AND THE OPPOSITION IS UNCERTAIN. END SUMMARY

1. UNDERCURRENT OF UNREST AND POLITICAL FERMENT HAS STIRRED

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BIHAR POLITICAL SCENE AGAIN OVER PAST TWO WEEKS. CENTRAL

FIGURE HAS BEEN SARVODAYA LEADER JAYA PRAKASH NARAYAN, WHO HAS PUBLICLY SINGLED OUT THE PRIME MINISTER AS THE SOURCE OF MANY OF THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC WOES, CALLED FOR A "MORAL REVOLUTION" AGAINST CORRUPTION IN RULING CONGRESS AND THE CIVIL SERVICE, AND STEPPED ON TO THE SCENE AS LEADER OF LARGE NON-VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS ON APRIL 8 AND 9. OPPOSITION-BACKED STUDENT AGITATIONS AGAINST PRICE RISES, CORRUPTION, AND UNEMPLOYMENT ENTERED TWENTY-SECOND DAY APRIL 11.

2. NARAYAN'S MOUNTING CRITICISM OF PRIME MINISTER'S LEADERSHIP AND OF CORRUPTION BEGAN DURING FEBRUARY-MARCH GUJARAT UPEHAVALS. NARAYAN ENJOYS WIDESPREAD RESPECT THROUGHOUT INDIA AND ESPECIALLY IN BIHAR AS LEADING FIGURE OF THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT, AND GANDHIAN SOCIAL WORKER, WHO RENOUNCED OPPORTUNITIES TO OCCUPY POSITIONS OF POWER FOLLOWING INDEPENDENCE. HIS CRITICISM HAS PROVOKED CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC REACTION FROM POLITICIANS, THE PRESS, AND EVEN THE PRIME MINISTER HERSELF.

3. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE GENERAL POLITICAL FERMENT WHICH HAS BEEN GROWING IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS, THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL MORALITY HAS BEEN DIRECTLY POSED IN TERMS WHICH COULD SERIOUSLY THREATEN THE PM'S INFLUENCE AND PRESTIGE. NARAYAN AND VINOBA BHAVE ARE THE ONLY TWO PEOPLE IN INDIA AT THIS TIME WHO CONTINUE TO HAVE NATIONAL IMAGES OF RECTITUDE AND CHARACTER SUFFICIENT TO REPRESENT POTENTIAL POLES OF GENUINE POPULAR ATTRACTION AS OPPOSED TO MRS. GANDHI. BOTH UNTIL NOW HAVE FIRMLY EXPRESSED THEIR DETERMINATION TO REMAIN OUT OF POLITICS. THIS HAS NOT CHANGED BUT NARAYAN'S EMERGENCE AS A REAL SYMBOL OF OPPOSITION TO OFFICIAL INEPTITUDE, CORRUPTION, AND THE ENTIRE DIRECTION OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS NOT LOST ON EITHER THE INDIAN POLITICAL OPPOSITION (JAYA PRAKASH WAS WELCOMED TO DELHI MAY 10 BY LEADERS OF ALL THE OPPOSITION PARTIES EXCEPT THE COMMUNISTS) OR MANY WITHIN CONGRESS ITSELF.

4. FOLLOWING A MARCH 9 MEETING WITH TOP SARVODAYA LEADER VINOBA BHAVE, MRS. GANDHI ANNOUNCED THAT BHAVE HAD EXPRESSED DISAPPOINTMENT OVER NARAYAN'S ASSOCIATION WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RECENT AGITATION. (BHAVE HIMSELF DOWNPLAYED ANY RIFT WITH J.P.) NARAYAN REACTED SHARPLY, PUBLICLY ACCUSING THE PRIME MINISTER OF ATTEMPTING "TO USE HER PROVEN SKILL IN TRYING TO DRIVE A WEDGE BETWEEN ME AND VINOBAJI AND THUS SPLIT THE SARVODAYA MOVEMENT." ON APRIL 8 HE ANNOUNCED TO A PUBLIC RALLY IN PATNA THAT HE WOULD LAUNCH A "STRUGGLE AGAINST THE VERY SYSTEM WHICH HAD COMPELLED ALMOST EVERYONE TO GO CORRUPT." FOLLOWING PM-NARAYAN EXCHANGE, NINE

LEFT-WING CONGRESS M.P. ATTACKED NARAYAN. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY JOINT STATEMENT BY 51 CONGRESS PARLIAMENTARIANS (REPORTEDLY WITH MRS. GANDHI APPROVAL) ATTACKING CPI AND LEFTISTS FOR CREATING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NARAYAN AND MRS. GANDHI. NARAYAN ARRIVED DELHI APRIL 10 TO PRESIDE OVER APRIL 13-14 "ALL-INDIA" CONFERENCE OF CITIZENS FOR DEMOCRACY." ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, OBJECT OF CONFERENCE WILL BE TO ESTABLISH NON-PARTISAN PERMANENT ORGANIZATION FOR "PRESERVATION AND STRENGTHENING OF DEMOCRACY" IN THE COUNTRY.

5. INDICATIONS THAT OPPOSITION PARTIES MAY ATTEMPT PUSH FOR GUJARAT-TYPE DISSOLUTION STATE ASSEMBLY SURFACED APRIL 10 WHEN JANA SANGH STATE PARTY PRESIDENT TOLD PRESS THAT 25-MEMBER JANA SANGH BLOC IN BIHAR STATE ASSEMBLY WILL RESIGN. BIHAR SSP LEADER HAS INFORMED PRESS THAT 17 SSP MLAS WILL SUBMIT RESIGNATIONS AT SAME TIME AS JANA SANGH LEGISLATORS. ASSEMBLY WAS ADJOURNED SINE DIE IN MID-SESSION BY GOVERNOR BANDARI FOLLOWING A TUMULTUOUS SESSION APRIL 8.

6. THE IMMINENT RESHUFFLE OF THE MINISTRY BY MRS. GANDHI APPEARED LIKELY WHEN CONGRESS AICC GENERAL SECRETARY, MRS. M. CHANDRASHEKHAR TOLD THE PRESS IN PATNA APRIL 10 THAT THE ENTIRE GHAFOR MINISTRY HAD OFFERED TO RESIGN. THE MOVE IS PROBABLY DESIGNED TO CREATE A FRESH CONGRESS STATE MINISTRY "IMAGE" WHILE SATISFYING THE DEMANDS OF DISSIDENT ANTI-L.N. MIYHRA/ GHASFOR FACTIONS FOR MORE REPRESENTATION. THE PRESIDENT OF THE STATE CONGRESS COMMITTEE AND MRS. CHANDRASHEKHAR WILL PROBABLY DISCUSS THE BIHAR SITUATION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER APRIL 11 AND MRS. GANDHI WILL DECIDE IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS WHOSE RESIGNATIONS TO ACCEPT AND HOW SHE WISHES

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THE CABINET RESHUFFLED. WE DOUBT THAT SHE IS PLANNING TO ASK FOR "PRESIDENT'S RULE" AT THIS POINT. A REJIGGERED "NEW IMAGE" CABINET IN BIHAR MAY BUY CONGRESS AND THE PRIME MINISTER SOME TIME. WE ARE NOT SURE HOW MUCH. AN OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH NARAYAN, THE DISGRUNTLED GROUPS HE NOW LEADS, AND WITH DISSIDENT BIHARI CONGRESSMEN WOULD FURTHER DAMAGE THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESTIGE, COMPLICATING HER TASKS IN THE AUGUST PRESIDENTIAL POLL AND CONCEIVABLY IN THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS LESS THAN TWO YEARS AWAY. CONGRESS MPS IN DELHI ARE OPENLY CRITICAL OF MRS. GANDHI FOR CRITICIZING NARAYAN, AN ACTION THEY SAY WAS A SERIOUS POLITICAL ERROR. MRS. GANDHI APPEARS TO HAVE COME TO THE SAME CONCLUSIONS AND TO BE TRYING TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE.

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